Study Unit

The Skills and Methods of Selling

By

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About the Author

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This study unit was reviewed by Mary Ann Reilly.

Preview

This study unit describes the close relationship between sales and a career as an interior decorator. You'll learn skills and techniques of selling and how to adapt them to develop your own style of selling. You'll also learn how to serve your clients through an organized follow-up system and how to prospect for new clients. You can apply the skills and techniques you'll learn for selling and follow-up to any product.

When you complete this study unit, you'll be able to

- List important traits of a good salesperson
- Describe aspects of attitude and appearance that are necessary for success in sales
- Describe how to approach a client
- Define and use examples of open-ended and close-ended questions
- Outline a method for reapproaching a client
- Describe the five areas in which you must qualify a client
- Define *feature* and *benefit* as these terms apply to selling furniture, and give examples of each
- Prepare examples of closing statements
- Define and set up a follow-up system
- List reasons why a follow-up system is important
- Write appropriate thank-you notes
- Describe a good telephone follow-up
- Describe ways to prospect for new clients

Remember to regularly check "My Courses" on your student homepage. Your instructor may post additional resources that you can access to enhance your learning experience.

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Color is an extremely integral part of interior decorating. Therefore, as you work through your program, be sure to study the photos and illustrations in their color format, available as PDFs. To access the PDFs, log on to the Penn Foster Web site and click on **My Courses.** Then, click on the open-book icon next to the unit you're studying.

The Skills and Methods of Selling

THE CONCEPT OF SELLING

Selling and Interior Decorating

As an interior decorator, you're also a salesperson. Along with home furnishings, you're selling your skills, your knowledge, and your expertise (Figure 1). Some of the most talented decorators often fail in their profession because they lack the necessary sales skills to present themselves and their products. Selling techniques are skills that can be learned, however. Successful salespeople don't have magic formulas for success. Rather, they've learned how to identify their clients' needs and present products that fulfill those needs. Remember what you learned about determining the clients' needs. More often than not, clients don't have a clear idea of what they need. That's why they come to you. You're the professional with the knowledge and ability to fulfill the needs of your clients.

Consider the example of a couple who walk into a furniture showroom. They tell the salesperson that they want to buy a sofa. The showroom has more than 100 sofas displayed on the floor. The styles as well as the size and scale of the sofas vary greatly. The fabrics or leathers on the sofas are also available in perhaps 1,000 or more choices! These clients might not know what they want or what they need in this sofa.

FIGURE 1—As an interior decorator, you must also be a salesperson.

At this point, the professional salesperson takes over. You must determine their needs. Start by asking open-ended questions so that the clients can begin talking and feeling more comfortable. Open-ended questions ask

An *open-ended question* is one that can't be answered with a simple yes or no. You'll learn more about this type of question later in this study unit.

- Who?
- What?
- Why?
- Where?
- How?

If you ask meaningful questions that help the clients to engage in a dialogue and gain confidence in you (rather than giving a yes or no answer), you've started on the path to a sale. Here are some questions you can ask:

- In what room will you use this sofa?
- Who uses the room?
- What level of comfort are you seeking?
- How much do you plan to spend on the sofa?
- What style appeals to you?

Encourage the clients to talk, to sit on the various sofas, and to determine what they like. Together, you're determining their needs. They now have a better idea of what styles, sizes, shapes, scale, and patterns are available to them. You've given them a menu from which to choose. You've made them comfortable with the product range and, most importantly, with you. Their confidence level in themselves and in you has increased to the point that they feel they know enough about a sofa to determine what they need and want.

Now you're selling. You're using your skills as a decorator to show different styles and patterns that will work within a client's room. You've helped them to determine their needs. That's wonderful. Do you think they're ready to place an order? After all, you've done your job and you've helped them realize their needs. Shouldn't they be ready to buy the sofa? Not yet. Rarely do individuals purchase the first time unless you've determined their needs and shown them the features and benefits of your product, your company, and your service and delivery.

There's more to sales than just determining the needs of the clients. After all, why should they buy from you now that they know what they need? They can shop around with their newly acquired knowledge and purchase a similar sofa, perhaps at a lower cost. Here's where your sales skills really come into play. Let's say that while you're showing the clients the sofas, you point out some quality features of the sofas. You explain to them that the cushion is constructed of a high-density foam core wrapped in polyester batting, covered with a muslin casing, and then inserted into the pillow cover, which unzips. You know that the cushion construction of your competitor's products is inferior to the product that you're selling. You explain that this is the reason that your sofa costs more than the sofa across the street.

You breathe a sigh of relief as your clients listen closely to your explanation, and you think, "Now I've got the sale!" Your clients continue to listen to your "lessons," thank you politely, and leave your store. What did you do wrong? You didn't sell because you stopped before the most important step in selling. You started out well by determining needs and showing the features of your product. However, you

must show the clients how these features will benefit them. The cushion features that you described will make your sofa superior to the competitor's sofa because the high-density foam insert won't flatten out over years of use. The polyester batting offers additional cushioning, and the muslin inner case keeps the batting in place. All of these features benefit clients. Unless you explain to them how this product will benefit them, however, you aren't selling!

Every business follows the same sequence of selling. That sequence includes

1. *Opener.* Make friends and get acquainted with your clients.
2. *Needs.* Gather information about your client's needs.
3. *Presentation of a product.* Present the product or service that fulfills your client's needs.
4. *Benefits.* Tell your clients what they'll gain by owning your products.
5. *Close.* Obtain your client's approval of an order. In other words, get a commitment to buy.
6. *Objections.* Overcome the client's objections.
7. *Real close.* After overcoming the client's objections, again ask for the sale.

"You can have everything in life you want, if you will just help other people get what they want."

—Zig Ziglar, American author, salesperson, and motivational speaker

The business of selling is an exciting one. Each client presents unique challenges. Selling is also a highly competitive career, a position that requires professionalism, confidence, and knowledge. All salespeople have several important tools at their disposal. How you use those tools determines your success. As you work through this study unit, you'll see what it takes to be a successful interior decorator who sells his or her product. Successful salespeople feel good about their products and themselves. They always think of what the client needs first.

Working in Sales

In the profession of selling, you're always "on." Like a teacher in front of a classroom of students, an actor on stage, or a professional basketball player, you're at the center of the

action. You're being judged by your appearance, knowledge, and skills, as well as your performance. Your people skills are always in use, and your success depends on the combination of all of these factors (Figure 2). As an interior decorator, you must learn the skills of communication. As you gain experience listening to your clients' needs, as well as providing solutions and communicating your recommendations, you'll sell more products and increase your income.

FIGURE 2—A successful salesperson makes use of people skills when dealing with clients.

Work that comes easily is fun and rewarding. Professional salespeople are those who feel their jobs are easy and fun, and provide a winning and successful career. For example, a professional basketball player makes shooting a three-point shot look easy, and he has fun doing it. Maybe you can't make a shot like that, but with practice, you'll be able to decorate the interior of a home and make the job look like fun. The decorating skills that you have must be coupled with sales skills, good attitudes, and self-confidence. These factors separate successful decorators from unsuccessful ones. Just as the basketball player practiced the three-point shot a thousand times or more to acquire the necessary skill and confidence to make the shot consistently, you must work at learning the techniques and confidence to be a successful

salesperson. The basketball player's shot was not luck, and selling a decorating scheme or a room full of furniture isn't luck either. Both are the result of acquired skills and knowledge. A professional salesperson is always practicing, retraining, and working toward the goal of getting the sale.

Selling Difficulties in Home Furnishings

Selling home furnishings requires a great deal of product knowledge (Figure 3). Consider a woman walking into a high-quality furniture showroom to purchase a sofa. She's already seen a sofa at a discount furniture store with fabric identical to one in the quality furniture store that she just entered. The high-quality sofa costs $800 more than the discount one. Unless she knows why there's such a difference in price, based on the features and benefits of the higher-priced sofa, she would be foolish to pay $800 more for a sofa that looks so similar. This is a fairly common problem for people selling home furnishings, because clients can't see the construction of the actual sofa. They can't peer through the fabric to see the quality features that separate a sofa that will last about 5 years from one that will last 15 to 20 years.

FIGURE 3—A decorator must have a great deal of product knowledge.

Now consider the gentleman who has been shopping for a box spring and mattress. In his travels, he saw two different sets of mattresses and box springs with an almost identical fabric. He lay down on both of them, and to him they felt similar. However, one was listed for $150 more than the other. Why was there a difference in price?

What about a client who wants wallpaper with blue and cream stripes? She finds what she wants at two different stores, one at $6 a roll more than the other? How does she know the difference between them to make an intelligent decision as to which one is best for her needs? If she buys solely on price, she would logically purchase the cheaper one if she thinks they're equal in appearance.

In all of these cases, your responsibility to your clients is to have the product knowledge necessary to explain the quality features that represent benefits to the clients and also account for a higher price tag. For example, the blue and cream wallpaper that's $6 a roll cheaper is a paper with a vinyl coating. The more expensive wallcovering is a fabric-backed vinyl wallcovering. The fabric-backed vinyl wallcovering is scrubbable, is three times heavier, and will outlast the cheaper wallpaper by about three to four times. Since the client has three young children, durability and cleanability are very critical to her decision. If you explained to her that she could spray a household cleaner on the walls and scrub the wallpaper with a sponge to remove fingerprints and soil marks, she would undoubtedly purchase the better product. If she knew that the lightweight vinyl-coated paper is only lightly cleanable with a damp sponge and not scrubbable, she would realize which one is the better choice to meet her needs.

For the couple purchasing the sofa, you could explain that the frame of the more expensive sofa is made of solid hardwood that was kiln-dried, and the joints consist of screws, glue, and a double-doweled construction. You could further explain to them that this sofa (1) will outlast the other sofa because the quality construction features will keep the frame solid and square, (2) will withstand the jumping and

bouncing of their young children, and (3) will ensure that they'll be able to reupholster rather than replace this sofa in 10 to 15 years. Which sofa do you think they would purchase?

The same use of product knowledge applies to bedding as well. Explain to your clients that the better pieces have a continuous wire design that provides superior support. There are no pressure points and no "roll-together" feeling. The ideal weight distribution will ensure them of a quality product that carries a 25-year warranty. You can guess which unit they'll purchase.

Even though many home-furnishing products look similar from the outside, you must learn what makes the products different inside. You must learn to point out these differences in quality to your clients so they can make educated choices. You want them to get the best value for their money, and you want to make the sale.

Important Traits of a Good Salesperson

You've already learned that knowing your products well is necessary for successful selling. Let's assume that you've worked hard and gained considerable knowledge of the product that you plan to sell to your clients. This is the first and most important trait that you must possess—the information and knowledge about your product. But what qualities must you have to communicate this knowledge to your client? The following traits are characteristic of successful salespeople.

1. Successful salespeople possess good product knowledge. Know what you're selling.
2. Successful salespeople continue their education. Practice your profession. Keep on learning; that is, keep yourself up-to-date on the new products and refresh your knowledge of the existing products.
3. Successful salespeople set goals. Plan to sell a specific dollar amount of merchandise during the next month. Set up a system to make each potential client a purchaser. Sharpen your skills to attain your goal.

4. Successful salespeople work smarter, not harder, by making the most of their time. Plan your day, your week, and your month. Know where you're going and how you're going to get there. Manage your time, manage your life, and strive for organization.
5. Successful salespeople keep good records. Research what products sell at a given time of the year and market them accordingly. If decorative accessories sell strongest in December, feature these accessories prominently in your store display. Be sure that the newest accessories are available and that you have a good inventory of the best sellers.
6. Successful salespeople network. Get to know other decorators and share knowledge and ideas with them. It will benefit all of you.
7. Successful salespeople provide excellent client service. Just because you've made a sale doesn't mean that you forget about your client. Keep your clients informed of anticipated delivery times, and let them know that you care about them as well as their orders. This attention helps to build repeat sales.
8. Successful salespeople take care of problems immediately. Don't let a wound go untreated. Take immediate action, even if it's unpleasant, to inform your client if there's a delay in delivery or a problem filling the order. Your client will appreciate your honesty as well as your efforts to correct the problem.
9. Successful salespeople have a professional personal image (Figure 4). Does your personal image project a confident, contemporary professional? Update your hairstyle or wardrobe, if necessary, to better project your professional image.
10. Successful salespeople stay motivated. The business of selling often includes rejection. Clients simply choose not to buy, regardless of your skills. Don't take it personally! Focus on your successes, not your failures.

FIGURE 4—As a professional, you should look like one. Make sure you dress in a businesslike fashion and conduct yourself to reflect your professionalism.

11. Successful salespeople are good listeners (Figure 5). Listen, listen, listen. How else will you find out what it is your clients really need and want?

FIGURE 5—The ability to listen—and take good notes—is an important characteristic of successful salespeople.

12. Successful salespeople believe in their products. You can't sell a product unless you sincerely believe that it's an excellent product and that it's the best product for your client. Unless that product fulfills your client's needs, chances are he or she won't return to you for other purchases (Figure 6).
13. Successful salespeople believe in themselves. Have confidence in your own abilities to project a winning appearance with a self-assured manner. Everyone prefers to celebrate with a winner rather than weep with a loser. What image do you project?
14. Successful salespeople recognize that selling is a process. From the initial greeting to the closing of the sale, all aspects of the process are equally important.

FIGURE 6—Successful salespeople believe in their products.

In the next section, you'll learn about your appearance as a salesperson, your attitude, and the way to approach a client. First, however, please take some time now to complete *Self-Check 1.*

Self-Check 1

At the end of each section of *The Skills and Methods of Selling,* you'll be asked to pause and check your understanding of what you've just read by completing a "Self-Check" exercise. Answering these questions will help you review what you've studied so far. Please complete *Self-Check 1* now.

In the spaces provided, indicate whether each of the statements is True or False.

_____ 1. To be a financially successful interior decorator, you must have a gift for selling.

_____ 2. Successful salespeople recognize that selling is a process composed of equally important aspects.

_____ 3. The clients' needs are the *most* important factor that you must determine to become a successful salesperson.

Check your answers with those on page 75.

PREAPPROACH AND APPROACH TIPS

Appearance

Many employers have guidelines regarding professional dress. Depending on the organization, they may recommend formal business attire, such as a dark suit with a white shirt or blouse, or they may allow a more casual professional style. Always question your potential employer during the initial job interview as to what type of attire is expected or recommended. Typically, your clothing should mirror what a client would expect a professional to look like.

It's important to have good personal hygiene. A shower in the morning before work is a must, followed perhaps with a splash of a fragrance that isn't overpowering. An attractive hairstyle of suitable length, clean fingernails, and an appropriate degree of makeup for women will contribute to a professional appearance. Dr. Albert Mehrabian, a pioneer in the study of communication, has determined that only 7% of meaning is conveyed in words, 38% is conveyed in the way in which something is said (that is, tone of voice), and 55% is conveyed through body language (Figure 7).The concept of *body language* includes such factors as posture, facial expressions, hairstyle, movements, and clothing.

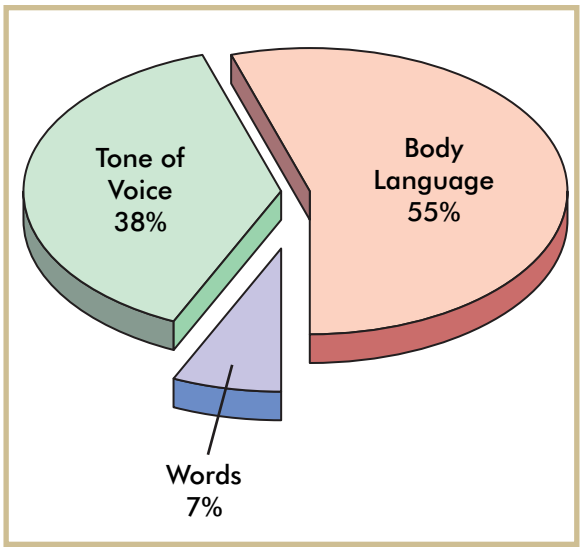


FIGURE 7—This pie chart represents Albert Mehrabian's communication model. According to Mehrabian, 93% of communication occurs nonverbally. Only 7% occurs through the words that are used.

Figure 8 illustrates a variety of examples of body language. Can you guess what they mean? Analyze the photos and see if you can determine what the individuals are communicating with their bodies. Then read the caption. Make sure you don't make these mistakes when dealing with clients. Your body language should say, "I'm interested in what you're telling me."

A

B

C

D

FIGURE 8—What are the people in these photographs communicating nonverbally? Playing with jewelry or clothes (view A) can be very distracting in a conversation and may indicate lack of interest. Crossing the arms over the chest (view B) often signals an unwillingness to hear what's being said. Rocking from side to side (view C) is often a sign of nervousness or impatience. Standing in a way that feels casual or comfortable (view D) can convey a sense of boredom or laziness.

The way that you dress and act makes a remarkable first impression on clients (Figure 9). Often, it's their first impression of you that influences their buying decision. How you look is as important as what you know and what you say. Professional dress is an important form of nonverbal communication. Dressing professionally doesn't mean you must buy expensive clothing. Dress with good taste, classic style, and in colors that compliment you. Since you, as an interior decorator, are involved in the fashion of furniture and home decor, you should reflect a style that's classic and not trendy.

FIGURE 9—A decorator should maintain a professional appearance to make a favorable first impression on clients.

Your style of dress is also affected by the climate in which you live. For example, a decorator in Los Angeles may dress differently from a decorator in Maine.

Sales Killer #1: Lack of Professional Appearance

Sales expert, Tom Hopkins, says, "If you want people to listen to you and heed your advice regarding your product or service, you have to come across—both in appearance and demeanor—as a professional expert. This means that you're appropriately groomed. Walk with confidence. People will buy from you based more on your conviction and enthusiasm for your product than they will your product knowledge."

Hopkins's book, *How to Master the Art of Selling,* teaches readers how to be comfortable selling their products, how to convince others of their value, and how to ask for a contract. The style isn't pushy or aggressive. It's focused on professional ways of serving your clients well.

Attitude

You're the only one who can determine the attitude for the interaction between you and your clients. At the initial approach, your appearance and posture and, most importantly, the smile on your face set the stage for a positive interaction. If you approach a client with a warm handshake and a pleasant greeting while making eye contact, you have a much better chance of making a sale than if you approach a client with a frown, poor posture, no handshake, a bored expression, and a dull introduction (Figure 10). People will respond to you immediately if they think you're a winner, so project a winning image.

FIGURE 10—Professional salespeople greet clients warmly to make them feel welcome.

You must project your genuine warmth to your clients. You must make your clients feel welcome. Maintain the same level of excitement and professionalism whether a client wants to purchase a lamp or an entire dining room. Here are some simple tips that can help you in your initial contact with a client:

1. Take pride in your appearance. Potential clients assess you the moment they see you. Project self-confidence and professionalism.

2. Add a genuine smile to your air of self-confidence and professional appearance. You like people, you like your job, and you know that you can fulfill the client's needs. Why shouldn't you smile?
3. Welcome your clients and make them feel comfortable. Do this with a warm smile and a simple greeting: "Hello. Welcome to home furnishings. My name is _____, and you are?" This allows you to introduce yourself as well as find out the client's name. Make sure you remember the client's name and use it repeatedly to show that you care enough to learn it. Don't let your welcome turn into a grilling of the client about why he or she has come to the store.
4. Try to assess the comfort level of the client. Just as the client is assessing you, you're assessing the client. If your client has a hesitant handshake, has little eye contact, exhibits tight body language, and isn't responding to your greeting, give your client some space. Allow him or her to become acclimated to the surroundings. Perhaps the client is uncomfortable in an unfamiliar store or is afraid to buy something because of an assertive salesperson. Allow your client to become comfortable; then return when he or she has had an opportunity to feel less threatened and more at ease.
5. Be professional. Don't take a client's lack of response to your efforts personally. You know your product, and you have confidence in your ability to sell that product to meet the client's needs. Continue to remain friendly, upbeat, and positive throughout the entire exchange. If you were a client spending a great deal of money to redecorate your living room, shouldn't you enjoy working with the salesperson? A positive, friendly, genuinely caring attitude separates the best salespeople from the average.

Where to Approach

Clients in your showroom for the first time may feel intimidated and uncomfortable in a new and different environment. A salesperson hovering near the front door creates a sense of

insecurity for these clients. They may feel that they're going to be pounced on by the salesperson as soon as they enter the showroom.

Some showrooms have a receptionist. Often the clients will speak with the receptionist first and ask if it's okay to just browse or where to find a particular item (Figure 11). This arrangement makes your sales job easier. The receptionist calls you on the phone at your desk, describes the clients to you, and explains what they're looking for. You can allow them to browse for a while and then catch up with them once they've become comfortable in their new surroundings. At this time, they'll be more receptive to your approach.

FIGURE 11—Some showrooms have a receptionist with whom the clients speak first.

When a showroom has no receptionist, the salespeople take turns with the clients. If it's your turn, you'll move to a position close to the entry door to take care of the next clients who walk into the store. Give the clients a minute or so to wipe their feet, remove their gloves, shake off the snow, or whatever else they do to separate themselves from the outside and become acclimated to the store lobby. You may then

approach them with a simple greeting, such as "Good morning. Welcome to our store. May I direct you to something?" They might mention something specific they saw advertised in the newspaper, or they might say that they're just looking.

If they mention a specific item from a newspaper ad, stay right where you are. Don't immediately take them to see the item. A good follow-up question is "Would you like to see only the item advertised in the newspaper, or would you like to see some other styles as well?" The clients will most likely hesitate and say that they want to see more or that they want to see only the advertised item. You reply, "I can tell you where it's located" or "I can point you in the right direction." Again, don't move. You can make the clients feel at ease if you allow them to take the lead. They won't get the feeling that you're following them or trying to sell something to them. Rather, you'll give the impression of a helpful, but not pushy, salesperson. Using this approach, you give the clients an option. If they choose to look only at the sale item advertised in the newspaper, you'll direct them to the specific item. If the clients say, "Sure, I'd like to see additional styles," then you can begin the qualifying process.

Qualifying is the process of gathering information from your clients. You'll study more about qualifying later in this study unit.

If the clients say they're just looking, stand still and say, "May I ask what you're looking for?" If they say they're looking for a particular item, then begin the qualifying process. If they say they aren't looking for anything in particular, you can reply, "Fine, we love lookers here. I'll catch up with you in a little bit to answer questions that you may have as you look through our store." What you've done is allow the clients to do what they want to do. You've let them know that you aren't ignoring them and that you'll be back to check on them to take care of their needs. In each situation, you've made the clients feel comfortable, welcomed, and assured that you're there to help them find what they're looking for.

A good place to approach a client in a furniture store is in a room setting within the showroom. Wait until you see the client looking at a particular item and begin a conversation about that item. If he's looking at a painting on the wall, for example, say something like, "Isn't that a wonderful Impressionist painting by Renoir? I've always loved the intensity of color and strong brushstrokes that he uses." If the client was admiring it, he'll surely respond. Again, you

aren't "selling" him something, just making conversation. Your next question might be, "Are you looking for a painting for a particular room?" Whatever sincere conversation you can make with a client opens the door to qualifying him to determine his needs. Keep in mind that he wouldn't have come through the door if he wasn't interested in something that you may have. You need to discover what it is that he wants or needs and help him to find it.

Warm Fuzzies

A *warm fuzzy* is a slang term for a compliment or action that makes someone feel good. You can give your client a warm fuzzy, but be sure it's genuine. An idle, insincere compliment falls flat and so will you. Clients can spot insincerity immediately and will begin to distrust you if they think your comments aren't genuine. Don't search for things to compliment, but if your client is wearing something you genuinely admire, say so. If a client suggests a fabric that works even better than the ones you've shown her, laugh and ask how long she's been an interior decorator. This compliment is genuine, and it makes the client feel good about herself and that what she's contributing to the process is worthwhile. A sincere compliment makes a person comfortable and reveals that you see him or her as a person, not just a potential buyer. All of us have unique personalities and must find our own level of comfort in using a warm fuzzy so that it's genuine and sincere—and it puts the client at ease.

In the next section, you'll examine some helpful information for salespeople, including open-ended and close-ended questions, words to use and words to avoid, types of clients, and other selling techniques. First, complete *Self-Check 2* to review what you've just studied.

Self-Check 2

In the spaces provided, indicate whether each of the statements is True or False.

_____ 1. The approach is the way in which you get a client to commit to a sale.

_____ 2. Before you approach a client, your professional appearance and demeanor must be established.

_____ 3. Your attitude is determined by the way a customer responds to you.

_____ 4. A warm fuzzy is a sincere compliment to your client.

Check your answers with those on page 75.

SELLING TECHNIQUES

Open-Ended and Close-Ended Questions

An *open-ended question* is one that can't be answered with a simple yes or no answer. It requires further information and allows you to begin the qualifying process. A responsive client makes the qualifying process easier. Asking open-ended questions gives clients an opportunity to talk and tell you about their needs (Figure 12). Conversely, a *close-ended question* is one that can be answered with a simple yes or no. See if you identify the following questions as either open-ended or close-ended:

1. What mood are you trying to achieve?
2. Will you place this sofa in a formal living room?
3. Which textures and colors do you find appealing?

The first and third questions require an explanation. They're open-ended questions. The second question is close-ended. It requires a simple yes or no answer. Open-ended questions provide you with more information than close-ended questions, and they're helpful in creating conversation. Using

FIGURE 12—Successful salespeople ask open-ended questions so clients can talk about their needs.

open-ended question can help you to determine your clients' needs so that you can help them find exactly what they need and want.

Words to Avoid

Clients come to you to fulfill their needs. Therefore, you should avoid using the words *me, mine, my house, my sofa, my children,* and the like. Clients don't want to hear about your personal life.

Never say *no*. This one word can kill a sale. For example, when a client asks if a wall covering comes in a navy blue stripe, don't say no. Instead, ask if there's a particular reason why the client wants it in a navy blue stripe. In this way, you're shifting your answer away from the negative and gathering further information that may help you to find a solution for the client.

"I don't think so" and "I don't know" are also killer phrases. As a professional, you're expected to know things. Instead, respond with "I'm going to check on that" or "I'll find out the answer to that question if you'll excuse me a minute." Always act knowledgeable and helpful. Of course you don't know everything about every product, but there are better ways of dealing with what you don't know without actually saying so. "I don't know" is a negative phrase. "I'll find out" is a positive phrase.

Avoid the word *maybe,* a word that shows lack of power and control. You're the guide. Your clients need to know that you know where you're going and how you're going to get there. A good salesperson is a leader.

> "People don't buy for logical reasons. They buy for emotional reasons."
>
> —Zig Ziglar

Words to Use Often

Yes, of course, definitely, and *I can* are all good examples of positive language you should incorporate into your sales vocabulary. Any phrases or words that are positive and show direction or leadership will help you to gain the confidence of your clients. Practice using phrases like *I will, I can, I know,* and *I assure you.* Your confidence will spill over to the client.

Let's say you've just been examined by your doctor, who tells you that your tonsils are inflamed, enlarged, and infected and will therefore continue to cause chronic illness. If the doctor says, "I think I can safely remove your tonsils, and perhaps this will prevent your chronic infections and high fevers," how would you feel about having the surgery? If the same doctor says to you instead, "I can safely remove your tonsils, you'll have little discomfort and a quick recovery, and this operation will end the chronic infections that have been causing your high fevers," wouldn't you feel more positive about the surgery? Of course, this is a drastic example of contrasting use of language, but it clearly illustrates how effective a positive approach is over an uncertain, unconfident approach.

It's the same situation with sales. Your clients need to know that they're making the right decision. You must reassure them that the money they're spending is being spent wisely. After all, they have family and friends who will be judging their decisions. They want acceptance and therefore need to have confidence in their choices.

When you're showing merchandise to a client, use words to romance the product. Here are two examples:

- Isn't this sleigh bed wonderful? Can't you picture it in your home with white eyelet pillow shams and a fluffy down comforter?
- The bright, clean lines of this contemporary picture frame give you a light, timeless feeling with no ornate details.

Use visual images in your descriptions; paint a picture for your clients. Remember that you're a visual person; you can picture what you're looking at in a different setting, but often your clients can't. Help them to see what you're seeing.

Figure 13 summarizes the words you should use and those you should avoid.

AVOID	USE OFTEN
Me, Mine, My	*Yes*
No	*Of course*
I don't think so	*I can, I will, I know*
I don't know	*I assure you*
Maybe	*Definitely*

FIGURE 13—Review this chart regularly to remind yourself of what words to avoid and what words to use with clients.

Types of Learners

Part of using a positive vocabulary is knowing which words to use with which clients. People have a number of different learning styles, and knowing them can help you to communicate with your clients. Some people learn by listening, so you talk to them and they learn what you're teaching. *Visual learners* learn best by seeing. They're the show-me people. *Kinesthetic learners* need to touch, feel, see, and do (Figure 14). They're more active learners.

If you're describing a drapery fabric, for example, use descriptions that appeal to all types of learners. Here are a few examples:

- Notice the rich colors of this fabric. The floral pattern combines a variety of different colors.
- Feel the weight of the fabric. It's lined to prevent fading.
- Sit in this recliner, put your feet up, lay back, smell the leather, and test how easily the mechanism brings your head back!

Use descriptive terms that tease all of the senses. Clients who react to a product are more likely to purchase it.

FIGURE 14—Kinesthetic learners need to touch and feel.

Types of Behaviors

Clients can also be categorized into four behavioral groups.

Dominant buyers are fast-paced, I-want-it-now buyers who don't want flowery descriptions, but rather quick, professional service. Dominants are decisive individuals who are accustomed to making major decisions quickly. They're task-oriented, egotistical, and often impatient. They appear to be unfriendly, make little or no small talk, and want to accomplish their mission. They're the buyers who know what they want, they want it immediately, and your sole mission is to provide them with the necessary details so they can purchase it now.

Expressive buyers are people-oriented, emotional, romantic buyers, who are very friendly and receptive. Because they love everything, however, you'll probably find it difficult to help them zero in on a particular choice. The greatest

challenge in working with expressive buyers is to keep them focused. If you don't, you'll probably have a lot of fun, but you won't necessarily make a sale.

Solid buyers are people-oriented, friendly, and social. Their buying needs focus around their families. The comfort and approval of their families are their primary concerns. A solid buyer wants to purchase items from a salesperson with whom they feel comfortable. They want to be liked and wooed. They move at a slower pace than dominant buyers, and they like to be greeted, not accosted (Figure 15).

FIGURE 15—Expressive buyers like to be greeted, not accosted, and they enjoy attention.

Analytical buyers are task-oriented. They make little or no eye contact, and often appear aloof. They want to know each and every detail about a product, from construction to delivery (Figure 16). You can recognize analytical buyers because they often carry a tape measure, notebook, and pen. They appear to be prepared and knowledgeable. Sharpen your product knowledge when you deal with analytical buyers.

FIGURE 16—Analytical buyers want to know all of the details of the products they purchase. They often research a product to learn more about it.

As you become experienced in dealing with clients, you'll be able to easily identify each type of individual. If a client "glazes over" when you're telling him about the dovetail joint construction of a drawer, you can bet he's not an analytical buyer! If a client has to bring in her entire family to see something, you can assume she's a solid buyer. If the client purchases an entire bedroom full of furniture, asks the amount of down payment necessary, and how soon you can deliver it, that client is a dominant buyer! If the client oohs and aahs about just about everything in the store, you're dealing with an expressive buyer.

You'll learn techniques for how to spot the different types of buyers and how to respond to them. It takes practice, experience, and acute observation to become a skilled salesperson. Soon you'll feel comfortable adjusting your selling style to the buying style of your clients.

Developing Your Own Style of Selling

You'll probably be working in an environment with other decorators. Study their selling styles. As you observe the techniques used by your fellow decorators, analyze your own selling style and skills. What works for other decorators won't necessarily work for you, but you can often alter a technique to suit your personality. Knowing your own buying style and the type of salesperson you appreciate dealing with is also helpful for developing your own selling style. Some decorators

are all business. Others are quiet and give their clients more space, and still others hover over and mother their clients. Just as there are so many different types of people, there are different styles of buyers and sellers.

Once you've acquired the necessary sales skills to present your products and services knowledgeably, you'll be able to adjust for whatever style of client you're working with. You'll feel confident enough to allow your own personality to emerge and give you a signature style of selling. You may have a favorite type of buyer, but successful salespeople are able to tailor their selling style to accommodate specific buying styles (Figure 17). You can reach a comfort level for dealing with a broad range of clients. Above all, be comfortable with yourself, let your own personality emerge, and you'll find that your clients are comfortable with you. Remember that the best salespeople are friendly, they appear to enjoy their work and their products, and they're eager to meet the needs of their clients.

FIGURE 17—Successful salespeople are able to tailor their selling style to accommodate specific buying styles.

The Pareto Principle

When you're starting to feel discouraged about sales, remember the tried-and-true *Pareto principle:* 80 percent of results come from 20 percent of efforts. And keep plugging away!

How to Reapproach

The *reapproach* follows the initial greeting, or approach. For example, suppose your clients indicated a desire to browse, and you've allowed them to do so. Now, it's time to reapproach them. By this time, the groundwork for the reapproach is set because you had already told them that you would catch up with them to answer the questions that you knew they would have. They're expecting you and may even have developed some questions so they won't look foolish when you come back. They're following the script that you established for them.

Let's say that the clients are in a living room display area examining a lamp. You're now ready to reapproach them. First of all, never approach or reapproach from behind clients. They may be self-absorbed, and you might startle them. Naturally, this wouldn't gain any points for you. Be certain that the clients see or hear you when you approach. Smile and try to make conversation about an item they're looking at or about the room in general. Perhaps a warm fuzzy is appropriate at this time, or a comment that has nothing to do with buying or selling. For example, you might say, "Mrs. Suarez, that's a great-looking coat. Did you get it locally?" or "Isn't that a wonderful lamp? Did you know that it's hand-cut, 24 percent lead crystal? See how its facets reflect the light!"

Anything that you can do to relax your clients and make them feel comfortable will reassure them that you're there to serve their needs—not just to sell them something. As they become comfortable with you, they'll undoubtedly loosen up and offer a comment such as, "I really could use some lamps in my living room. Do you think these would look good with a rose floral sofa?" Okay, you're on! They're ready for more information and have indicated why they came into the store.

You'll learn to gauge clients and to know when it's appropriate to say something like, "And what specifically were you looking for today?" or "May I ask the reason you're shopping here today?" or "What project are you working on?" Keep in mind the following guidelines for both the approach and the reapproach:

- Create the image of a friendly and caring place to shop. You're interested in the client's needs, not in making the sale. If you focus on the client's needs, the sale will come.
- Demonstrate that you're a professional by your appearance, your dress, and your confidence.
- Maintain a business relationship. Don't become personal with your client. If there's a pregnant woman in the store, don't start telling her about your one-year-old child!
- Volunteer your assistance to answer any further questions the client may have.
- Always demonstrate energy and enthusiasm, even if the client purchases a very minor item or if you know that the client isn't going to commit to anything at the time. Clients will remember you and come back to you if you show courtesy and concern for their needs, even if they're minor. Next week they may return to request your services for decorating an entire home.
- When clients are leaving, whether or not they made a purchase, address them by name, shake hands, and offer a parting "gift"—a sales flier, a brochure, or an entire catalogue. Staple to the front of the gift your business card with the days that you work written on it. You want the clients to remember you. You want them to study the brochure or catalogue and call or return to you with further questions.

In the next section, you'll learn how to qualify clients—that is, how to gather information from them. First, please complete *Self-Check 3.*

Self-Check 3

In the spaces provided, indicate whether each of the statements is True or False.

_____ 1. "I'll find out" is a phrase that you'll want to use often.

_____ 2. "Who will use this room?" is an example of a close-ended question.

_____ 3. The term *reapproach* describes a chance to sell something to a client.

_____ 4. An example of romancing the product is making a statement such as, "Smell the cedar, touch the finish, see the finely crafted detail."

Check your answers with those on page 75.

QUALIFYING THE CLIENT, NOT THE PRODUCT

Five Areas to Qualify

The term *qualifying* refers to the gathering of information. If you qualify your clients properly, you'll be able to determine their needs and to satisfy those needs (Figure 18). You should identify the needs of your clients by qualifying them in five categories: what, why, budget, how, and when.

FIGURE 18—Successful salespeople qualify their clients carefully—that is, they find out what they need to know about their clients so they can satisfy their needs.

Area 1: What

When you reapproach a client who is just browsing, the client may still say she's only browsing. Such a person may take more time to qualify because you must first find out what she's looking for. A good way to deal with such a person is to ask, "And *what* is it that you're browsing for today? May I help you to find it?" You've indicated that it's okay to browse, yet you're there to help her find what she's browsing for, not to sell her anything. If you saw her admire a sofa, you might also want to explain that the store has many room settings, and that there are sofas in many of them. "Is there a specific style of sofa that you're looking for? Where will you

use this sofa? What size sofa are you looking for?" The client probably doesn't have the answers to all of these questions, but you do. She needs help, and perhaps your questions will make her realize that the help she needs can come from you.

Area 2: Why

Suppose a client walks into a furniture store and says, "I'm looking for a 91-inch blue sofa." Actually, a blue sofa may not necessarily be what she needs. She may think that she does, but let's find out exactly what it is that she really needs. A good response would be, "May I ask *why* you specifically want a blue sofa?" Her answer might be, "Because I think it will match my blue carpet, blue walls, and beige chair." Now, you're on to something. You're the decorator, so it's your job to ask more open-ended questions and help her to think beyond just a blue sofa. Counter with, "Perhaps a floral pattern with blue in it with some rose and yellow accents would create more interest in the room. Would you like to see some fabric swatches that we could put on a number of different 91-inch sofas?" This information tells the client that you can offer more options than just one blue sofa, that you care about her room, and that you're willing to show her some new ideas. You didn't say a thing about buying a sofa, you were patient, and you gave the impression that you had the time, knowledge, and creative skills to work with her. How can she not respond to you?

This situation could have ended differently, however. After the client mentions that she wants to buy a 91-inch blue sofa, suppose you respond with "Let me show you one," or "We don't have any 91-inch blue sofas. Could you use a yellow one?" What message does the client receive from this exchange? Chances are she might not like the only available blue sofa, and she has absolutely no interest in a yellow one. The impression she gets is that you'll sell her anything, even if it isn't what she wants.

In this example, you began with an open-ended question: "May I ask why you specifically want a blue sofa?" Then you suggested a floral pattern with blue in it, and you offered to show her a variety of fabrics that she might use on a number of different sofas. What you're saying is that you can help the

client choose several fabrics that have her favorite colors in them and still pick up the blue from your carpet. You offered a solution and sparked the interest of your client. You've qualified her needs and will likely be treated to a comment like, "Wow, I never even thought of that!"

Area 3: The Budget

In addition to qualifying the needs and wants of a client, you must also qualify the client's budget. If your client has indicated a desire to see sleeper-sofas, but hasn't purchased a piece of quality furniture in 20 years, she'll probably suffer from initial "sticker shock." In other words, she'll be surprised at the prices you quote to her. You must help your client realize the cost of quality furniture and how she can pay for it. Ask her if she's comfortable with the price on the unit she likes. If she says that she's somewhat taken back by the cost, talk to her about it. Ask when she last purchased a new sleeper-sofa, and then mention that things obviously have increased in cost since then. If she's priced a new car recently, she knows that the prices have definitely increased in the last 20 years for both sofas and cars. Just as cars have been improved over those 20 years, so have sleeper-sofas. The mechanisms are smoother, the comfort level is greater, and the ease of operation is just remarkable.

Show her what she's paying for; demonstrate the benefits to her. Make her aware of what her money is buying. If you do so convincingly, she'll understand. Ask her if a financing program that your store offers would make it easier for her to pay for the sleeper-sofa. Provide her with solutions. If she had planned to spend half of what this costs, give her some options so that she can buy it. Certainly she won't find the same quality features at a lesser price, so she's going to purchase it if the process isn't too painful.

New salespeople are usually uncomfortable about money issues, but you need to determine what your clients can afford to spend and offer them alternatives if your product is beyond their budget. In the example we're using, suppose the client really feels that the sleeper-sofa is out of her price range. Show her a different style or model that may be less expensive. Show her a less-expensive fabric that will reduce

the price of the sleeper-sofa (Figure 19). Then she can make the decision. Perhaps after seeing the alternatives, she'll know that she wants the original choice and will finance it or charge it to get exactly what she wants.

What you've done is qualify her buying budget. During the process, you've demonstrated your concern and your willingness to sell her a less-expensive item and therefore make less of a commission. How can she not appreciate your efforts?

FIGURE 19—If your client feels that the cost of a piece of furniture is too much, you can suggest a less expensive fabric.

Area 4: How

Another needs consideration that requires qualification is the how issue. Ask some how questions like these:

- How do you plan to use this room?
- How many children will be using this sofa in front of the television in the family room?
- How do you entertain?

These are all good questions to determine the type of fabric to specify, the type of frame to use, and the size and number of the pieces of furniture. You're asking your client to tell you a story about the entire room so that you can recommend what's appropriate. Your knowledge of fabric durability will emerge during this discussion. Again, you're establishing yourself as a knowledgeable professional. The client will relax and begin to trust you and the information that you're supplying.

Area 5: When

When is another important area to qualify. A question like "When do you need this furniture delivered?" may determine whether you need to special-order a sofa, use an express program, or sell from the floor. If your clients need a product immediately, that obviously eliminates an eight-week delivery item. Determine these needs before they fall in love with a custom product that won't fit into their time schedule.

Avoiding the Style Question

Suppose a client walks into your store and asks to see an ornate, Victorian-style mahogany console table. At this point, you have two options. The first is to say politely, "I'm sorry, we don't have that," but we've already established that these are words you never should use. Your second choice is to reply with, "May I ask why you want a Victorian-style mahogany console table?"

The better response, of course, is the second one. It's an open-ended question that requires an explanation. The client can then go on to explain that she inherited several pieces of mahogany furniture from her grandmother and would like to match them. Your response should go something like this: "You're so lucky! I bet the antique furniture is just beautiful. No modern furniture company will have exactly what you're looking for, but we do have various console tables in a mahogany finish that would complement your treasures. May I direct you to them?"

What you've done is to begin the solution process. You'll explain to her that the finish on the antique pieces will never completely match a new piece of furniture, nor will you be able to exactly replicate the style. What you could emphasize is that an accent piece in a similar style and finish will add interest to the room and highlight her wonderful heirlooms. What you've done is to open the door to a solution. You're thinking beyond the boundaries of the original request. You know that she could spend the rest of her life searching for her Victorian-style piece and most likely never find it. You know your product, you know what styles you can mix within a room decor, and you have the confidence to do so (Figure 20). Make use of these skills and knowledge rather than stopping the qualifying process immediately after the client's initial request.

FIGURE 20—Successful salespeople know their products and what styles can mix within a room decor.

Often, clients come into a showroom and request a specific finish, such as golden oak or dark pine. Not every store carries every finish, so you must be prepared. Ask immediately why they want this specific finish. If they respond by saying that they need a new golden oak cocktail table to match some 10-year-old golden oak end tables, you have an opportunity to help them. Explain that no manufacturer will guarantee that the finish of a new piece of furniture will exactly match

that of a 10-year-old piece of furniture. The finish will have mellowed, aged, and changed over the last 10 years. Mention this and ask the clients if they can purchase a cocktail table from the original manufacturer in the same style in the same finish. More than likely, they'll say no. Here's your opportunity to sell them not only a new cocktail table but two end tables as well. Show them the newest collections and let them see how much nicer a new grouping would be.

What about a client who comes into a store and wants an outdated style of recliner to match what he already has in the room? The opportunity here is to update the look of his entire room by showing him that the style he's looking for no longer exists. Suggest that perhaps you could work out a long-range plan to help him modernize and freshen the look of the room.

Encourage your clients to purchase classic styles in good taste. Just like your basic navy blue suit, items with classic lines are timeless. You don't want a disappointed client! You want a client who is satisfied with your recommendations and will want your advice for future purchases. Sales skills combined with product knowledge presented tactfully will overcome the style issue.

Tips on Talking Money

When you first begin your career in sales, the word *money* is a difficult one to say. You may have a fear of rejection, and price is often the cause. Money talk, however, is part of the selling process. You need to be objective and become comfortable with the word. After all, your clients know that whatever you're selling isn't free. And since you don't barter, they need to pay with money in some form (Figure 21). During the qualifying process, you must get an idea of your clients' budget. If they're on a limited budget, you can suggest less expensive collections, fabrics with a lower price tag, and a long-range plan to build the room. As a professional, it's your responsibility to prescribe the right product at the right price and to do so with confidence.

FIGURE 21—As a salesperson, money is involved in every transaction you make. You must become comfortable talking to your clients about prices and money.

Let's say that your clients want to buy a desk. You can determine their price range by a simple multiple-choice question, such as, "We have maple desks at about $900, some ornate cherry desks at about $1,300, and some unique mahogany desks starting at about $1,600. Which price do you think best suits your budget?" This simple choice of several options requires an answer, a decision, and perhaps a little explanation. Your clients' answers save you time because now you can show them only what's available within their price range (Figure 22). You've qualified them in relation to the money factor. Show them a desk for $1,000, and perhaps they'll purchase the corresponding desk chair to go with it. After all, they told you only what they wanted to pay for the desk, not for all of their needs. Or show them a desk for $800 when they said they wanted to spend $1,000, and then the price of the chair at $200 still fits within their budget.

FIGURE 22—Successful salespeople qualify their clients in relation to the money factor and show them only what's available within their price range.

Good salespeople also say "plus tax" after quoting a price, as opposed to giving the clients the exact total of the final purchase. Once the clients have committed to a purchase, then you actually add the tax.

They knew that they were going to pay tax because you mentioned it after you told them the list price, so this isn't deceptive or dishonest. This strategy gives you a psychological advantage, however, and successful salespeople use any honest tactic as a tool in the selling process.

If you determine during the qualifying process that your client isn't concerned about price, then that changes the money factor considerably. The price is neutralized as a barrier to your suggestions. You now have a wider range of options to present to your client. You can see why it's so critical to determine the money issue as soon as possible to save time, prevent embarrassment to your clients, and allow you to meet their needs.

Nervous about Sales?

Many people are nervous when they're attempting to make a sale. Making a sales presentation can be a real challenge. Here are a few tips that can help:

- Always be well prepared.
- Rehearse ahead of time, picturing your prospect.
- Don't rush. It's OK to speak slowly. If you would like, keep a glass of water nearby. Take a drink to slow things down a bit.
- Stand up when you make an important phone call. It can make you feel more confident and in control.
- Always smile on the phone. People on the other end can hear it.
- Highlight your expertise. Mention specific examples that reveal your knowledge of your field throughout the selling process—especially when closing the sale. When your clients think of you as an authority, they'll have more confidence in your work. And you'll feel better about your work as well!

The issue of "sale" prices can be a tricky one for a nonseasoned salesperson. Consider a realistic example in which a quality manufacturer is running a 20% off sale. Your client knows the value of the product (or has been taught by you what the value is) and realizes that this is a valid sale. Now consider all of the massive 75% off sales, storewide sales, and one-time-only sales that seem to occur at the same store with some frequency. Do you think that clients are so gullible that they believe they're actually getting a quality item at half off the regular price? It's doubtful. If the store owners can

make a profit with a 50 or 75% discount and still pay for all of that advertising, the product wasn't worth the full price in the first place! Obviously, the price was overinflated to begin with. If a store repeatedly advertises inventory sales, going-out-of-business sales, and one-time-only sales, but continues to operate in the same location (perhaps under a modified name), wouldn't you realize that those sales are scams? How much credibility does that store have with its clients?

On the other hand, if there's a genuine, believable reason for a sale, people will rush to that store. For example, a store that's relocating to a new facility will want to clear out the existing stock in the old store and have only new samples at the new location. If that store runs a clearance sale, people will come. A reputable store that has suffered fire damage in one area and needs to sell off the existing stock also has a believable, logical reason for a sale, and people will come. Strong salespeople are honest with their clients and will tell them the reason for a sale price. For example, the $200 mirror that they see sale-priced for $150 may have a discontinued frame or may be manufactured by a company no longer in business. The reason for a sale item establishes the value of the sale price. The clients in this case know why they're saving $50, and it becomes of value to them. Strong salespeople won't sell a sale item to clients if it doesn't meet their needs. Their needs must be met before a sale is successful. A bargain is a bargain only if the client needs the item. You must remain in control and lead your client to the right buying decision. You're the professional.

In the next section, you'll learn how to present merchandise and close a sale. First, please complete *Self-Check 4*.

Self-Check 4

1. What are the five areas you should qualify when working with a client in a sales situation?

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. How can you avoid the style question?

   a. Determine the clients' needs.
   b. Be honest and admit that you don't carry that style.
   c. Persuade the clients that they would like something else.
   d. Diplomatically explain that the style is outdated.

3. The *best* way to handle the money issue is to

   a. talk about value to avoid mentioning a price.
   b. push items that are on sale so the clients think they're getting a great deal.
   c. discuss financing before you begin the qualifying process.
   d. become comfortable talking about the cost of an item and the financing options available.

Check your answers with those on page 75.

CONTINUING THE SELLING PROCESS

Presenting Merchandise

The merchandise in your store is on display for clients to look at, touch, sit on, and examine. However, your job is to present the merchandise in such a way that the clients understand what it is they might purchase. To do this, you can appeal to their senses, and you can present the features and benefits of the items they're considering.

Appealing to the Senses

You've already studied about different learning styles and how to adapt your sales presentation to them. Let's now expand your presentation skills by showing how you can present merchandise to appealing to all five of your clients' senses. The following statements illustrate techniques for presenting merchandise by targeting the senses. You should be able to identify which sense is being highlighted in each example.

- Listen to the beautiful sounds this wind chime produces. Imagine sitting outside on your patio enjoying its music on a breezy summer day.
- Feel the petals of this silk flower arrangement. They're so soft and delicate that you can't tell they're not real.
- Can't you just picture your entire family enjoying a delicious holiday meal using this beautiful china?
- Look closely at the detailing on this cut crystal vase. It's hand-cut, so no two pieces are exactly the same.
- Take a deep breath. Doesn't the cedar lining in this chest smell wonderful?
- Hold your hand on the marble top of this plant stand. It feels cold, doesn't it? Just as real pearls feel cold to the touch, so does real marble. You can tell the difference between an imitation, resin top and the real thing, not only by the beauty and grain, but also by touch.

Feature and Benefit Selling

A professional salesperson soon learns what works. Selling features and benefits is key to a successful product presentation. A *feature* is a physical fact or characteristic of a product. A *benefit* is the reason to buy the product—that is, the advantage the product has for the client. Let's examine some features and how a successful salesperson might describe their benefits to a client.

Feature. A company provides fabric matching on its upholstery jobs.

Benefit. Your sofa will have a professional, quality appearance.

Presentation. Here's how you can present this feature and benefit. "You've selected a very dramatic fabric with a large pattern repeat (Figure 23). The sofa and fabric will be a focal point in the room. The manufacturer will match and align the pattern to create a continuous pattern flow. The welt will also be matched, which is an additional feature of a fine upholstered piece. You and your guests will admire the quality workmanship and attention to detail that this company provides. The back of the sofa will also be pattern matched so that you can float the sofa in the room instead of placing it against a wall."

FIGURE 23—A large pattern repeat like this one requires special treatment when the fabric is used as upholstery. If you know a company can professionally handle a job like this, present it as a benefit to your clients.

Now the clients can visualize the feature of pattern matching and understand how it will benefit them. This benefit also helps to justify the cost difference of products from a company that doesn't offer such strict matching and the quality company from which they're purchasing.

Feature. The drawer guides are wooden and are waxed. They're constructed with dovetail joints (Figure 24).

Benefit. The drawers are easy to operate and are stronger.

Presentation. To present this feature to a client, you can say, "See how easily the drawer slides into the case. You can push the drawer back into the case with only one finger. If you're holding a stack of clothing, the telephone, or your infant in one arm, you can use the other to close the drawer. You don't need two hands. In addition, the dovetail joints make the construction stronger and more durable."

FIGURE 24—The panels in this drawer are joined with dovetail joints.

Feature. The spring system in this sofa is connected by a metal wire system, instead of the eight-way hand-tied system common on less expensive sofas.

Benefit. Hand-tied coils use a cord that over time stretches and creates a nonuniform spring alignment. With the wire clip system, your springs stay in place, properly aligned for the life of the sofa.

Presentation. The wire clip system in this sofa is more expensive than a hand-tied system. However, the springs will stay in place for the life of the sofa. Your sofa will look like new much longer.

Feature. The table leaves have an apron like the table.

Benefit. When the leaves are in the table, the table surface looks continuous.

Presentation. To explain this benefit, you can say, "When you put this leaf into the table, there will be no space between the apron of the table and the leaves. In other words, when you expand the table for extra seating, the table will still have a quality appearance."

Feature. This dresser is made of fine cherry hardwood (Figure 25).

Benefit. Cherry hardwood is a very durable, beautiful wood.

Presentation. To present the benefits of this feature, you can say, "Cherry is a beautiful hardwood that's both durable and long-lasting. If you take care of it, it will be beautiful for years, and you'll be able to pass it down to your children or grandchildren someday.

FIGURE 25—Furniture made of hardwood is both beautiful and durable.

From these few examples, you can see how important it is to point out the features of a product and how those features create benefits. Your clients need to know what they're buying, and they need to know what quality features to look for in fine furniture. This product knowledge will encourage them to purchase the better product. To determine which features and benefits your clients need, qualify them by asking open-ended questions, such as these:

- How do you plan to use this room?
- Who will be using this room?
- Have you ever owned an item like this before? If so, what did you like about it, and what didn't you like about it?

- Have you ever owned leather upholstery before? Did you know that leather lasts three or four times longer than fabric?
- Do you allow your family to eat and drink on the furniture in the family room?
- What ages are your children?

Remember that selling is a process. Continue qualifying a client until you know what it is that he or she needs. Then meet those needs. Determining what features and benefits they need will help you to save time and direct them to a solution.

Pitfalls of Overconfidence

When things are going well, you often feel that you can do anything. This confidence is certainly a good quality, as long as you keep it in check. As a decorating professional, you must be sure of your own ability to present a product and sell that product. Since rejection is a big part of sales, you must remain optimistic and self-confident. Overconfidence can be a killer, however. If you're suffering from overconfidence, you tend to forget details, lose patience, and not work as thoroughly as you should. You're good at selling, so you expect the client to buy.

More often than not, a client will buy, at least when you do a thorough job with the entire selling process. If you become lazy about your job and simply expect the sales to happen, however, they generally don't buy. If you act too confidently, bordering on arrogance, you lose the trust of your clients. You make them feel as if they don't count. They think they're merely a number in the sales journal.

As a professional, you can't afford to be arrogant, snooty, or snobbish. Your job is that of a trained professional. Maintain that level of professionalism and you'll be respected and your opinion will be valued. Your reputation will grow, and so will your business (Figure 26). Treat your clients with respect; treat them as you would want to be treated if you were in their shoes.

FIGURE 26—Always main a level of professionalism in your dealings with your clients.

Another important rule of thumb is to treat your coworkers, the office personnel, the delivery staff, and the cleaning staff with the same degree of respect as you treat your clients. You're part of a team, and there's no I in teamwork!

Remember: It's Only a Sale

The best advice for making sales is to lighten up. Rejection is a natural part of sales, but that doesn't mean you have to let it get you down—even if you make a mistake that costs you the sale. It's bound to happen, whether you're just learning or have had years of experience. Learn to laugh at your mistakes. Your attitude makes a big difference in how happy you are. And happiness breeds success.

Closing the Sale

The *close* occurs when a client says, "Yes, I'll take it!" After all of your hard work throughout the sales process, the sale is the bottom line, the ultimate goal. Making the sale establishes the client as yours. You've developed a relationship throughout the process, and the client has the confidence in you and your product to trust you with the sale. More often than not, however, actually getting the client to say yes and commit to the sale can be difficult. You must learn to "ask" for the sale. Clients aren't trained buyers and may not know the process. They may not recognize the cues you give them that indicate they should commit to the purchase. Now, you'll learn a few ways to ask for the sale.

Throughout the sales process, you should give the clients some buying cues. Explain to them that you'll bring the fabric samples that they liked to their home, you'll prepare a floor plan, develop a decorating scheme, and will meet with them for a presentation. Explain what to expect at that presentation. You'll review the choices and decisions that you've made together, you'll reconfirm the budgetary guidelines, and you'll expect a decision from them. Tell them to be ready to make an initial payment because this is the time to get the decorating products on order. Now the clients know what to expect; they're aware of the process. There will be no surprises after your presentation. They know that they're expected to place the order at that time—period.

Let's say that Mrs. Jacobs is purchasing a sectional sofa. She has been in previously, selected the fabric, and brought her husband in to see the sofa. He likes the lines, he agrees with her fabric choices, the price is within budget, and both are pleased. You say, "Well, I think we've got a winner! Mr. Jacobs, your wife did a great job. She obviously considered your likes and needs throughout the selection process. How would you like to pay for this? We accept Visa, MasterCard, Discover, American Express, personal checks, and cash." This form of closure is called an *assumptive close,* because you're assuming it's a sale. An assumptive close is one that you use after you've heard the "buying signs" of approval. This sectional is obviously what they want, they agree on it,

so make the sale. Don't hesitate, don't give them an opportunity to change their minds, and don't give them a chance to leave your store and purchase elsewhere.

Here are some other examples of statements that can also be used to accomplish an assumptive close:

- Let me get an order form.
- Please tell me if this is the correct spelling of your last name.
- Is there anything else that you need for the room today before I write up the order?
- I know you're going to love this piece. Let's get it on order so you can have it in time for Monday night football games!

Another form of closure is the *alternate close,* also called the *either-or close.* During an alternate close, you involve the clients in a decision, with the assumption that they're going to purchase the product. After all, isn't that why they came in? Allow them to decide by asking an open-end question to move them nearer to closing the sale. Here are some examples of questions you can use to close a sale:

- If you were to order it today, would you prefer the night table with the door or drawer?
- Of the two finishes, do you prefer the painted or the natural wood finish?

Another form of closing is the *urgency closing,* which you use to indicate that it's important that the clients make a decision immediately. The following statements are examples of urgency closings:

- That's the last floor model we have. This lamp has been discontinued, and it has been a popular seller. Since you really like it, you should purchase it now before it's gone!
- I know that if you order this table today, you'll have it in time for Christmas dinner. If you wait much longer, I can't guarantee a delivery in time for Christmas.

Sometimes clients stall a purchase. They'll tell you that they really love everything, but they need more time to think it over. If you've exhausted all of the closing possibilities and the clients still haven't closed, tell them that you can give them a few days and will call them for a decision on Friday. Ask, "Is the afternoon or morning better for you?" "Is three o'clock okay? Great, I'll call you on Friday at three, and you can place your order over the phone with Visa or MasterCard." This approach again lets them know what you expect of them. Remember to speak positively as this example indicates. Tell the clients that they can place their order when you phone. Never say, "If you want to place your order. . . ." Instead, expect the order. The clients will know you expect it, and they should be prepared to place the order.

Always ask for the sale. Clients often wait for your approval, so give it to them by telling them that they should place the order since together you've reached a wonderful solution for their decorating needs. When you get their yes, write up the order (Figure 27), get their signatures and the down payment, and put the order in the proper place. Thank your clients and allow them to leave. Allow no hesitation, no lingering, and no opportunity for them to change their minds.

FIGURE 27—Successful salespeople write up the order when the clients say yes.

Closing can be a struggle or a logical conclusion to a process. You must practice continually to hone your closing skills. Study other design professionals and watch their successful closing techniques. You can do it, too.

In the final section of this study unit, you'll consider the follow-up system you can use with your clients. First, please complete *Self-Check 5.*

Self-Check 5

1. A/An _____ is an inherent quality of a product.

2. A/An _____ is the reason a client would want to buy a product because it offers an advantage that another product does not.

3. If you're absolutely sure that you're going to make a sale because you're such a superb salesperson, you're suffering from a case of _____.

4. *True or False?* You must never ask for the sale.

5. *True or False?* After you've made a sale, received a down payment, and completed the paperwork with your clients, it's a good idea to ask them to stay and chat so you can get to know them better.

6. *True or False?* Always speak positively and expect your clients to place an order.

Check your answers with those on page 76.

THE FOLLOW-UP SYSTEM

A *follow-up system* is an organized plan to maintain good client service and relations and to contact clients for future sales. The clients with whom you've established a relationship are your best repeat clients. Naturally, you want to keep these clients as well as add new clients to your client base. A follow-up system is the method to accomplish this. Put aside 15 minutes at the beginning and end of your day for follow-up. Discipline yourself to write thank-you notes or make phone calls during these times, and soon this regular routine will become a habit (Figure 28). By managing your time in a disciplined manner, you can accomplish much in a mere 30 minutes a day.

FIGURE 28—Use 15 minutes at the beginning and the end of the day for follow-up activities like making phone calls and writing thank-you notes.

Setting Up a Follow-Up System

All decorators work somewhat differently in regard following up their clients. The following are general guidelines to help you set up your own system and then adapt it to meet your needs. There are four main parts to an effective follow-up system: the daily section, the monthly section, the A–Z section, and the item section.

Daily Section

A *daily section* can be a desk calendar, a daily planner, or an appointment book that you can carry with you at all times (Figure 29). Use a daily calendar, planner, or appointment book that provides one complete year's worth of daily entries. If you have a personal computer, you can create a daily section on the computer, file it for reference, and update it easily.

FIGURE 29—Your daily calendar should be small enough to carry with you.

A daily calendar is very important to an interior decorator. If you have an appointment scheduled for Friday at two o'clock, mark it clearly on your daily calendar so you can plan your day accordingly.

In addition to keeping track of daily appointments, this calendar can serve as a journal or a record-keeping device. Jot down notes indicating when you first met your client, when you placed the client's order, and when you promised to call with an appropriate delivery time. If your notes are accurate, you can double-check what the client looked at, which fabrics he or she chose, and then access this information when you see the client again. Remember to flip forward eight weeks or so from the date of ordering and make a note to recheck on delivery, to remind yourself to send a thank-you note, or to remind the client of an upcoming sale.

Monthly Section

A *monthly section* is similar to the daily section, except that it allows more long-range planning (Figure 30). You can use a regular wall calendar for your monthly section, but most daily planners also include a page for each month as well. The monthly section shows you an entire month at a glance so you can see what lies ahead. For example, suppose you meet a client on the 15th of the month, and you know that the sale ends on the 30th of the month. Make a note on your monthly calendar to call and remind the client of the end of the sale.

This kind of attention shows clients that you care about their needs and you want them to get the sale price. It also creates a sense of urgency to encourage them to make a decision soon. If a new sale will start during a particular month, make sure you mark it on your monthly section so that you can notify your clients with direct mail advertising or phone calls prior to the sale.

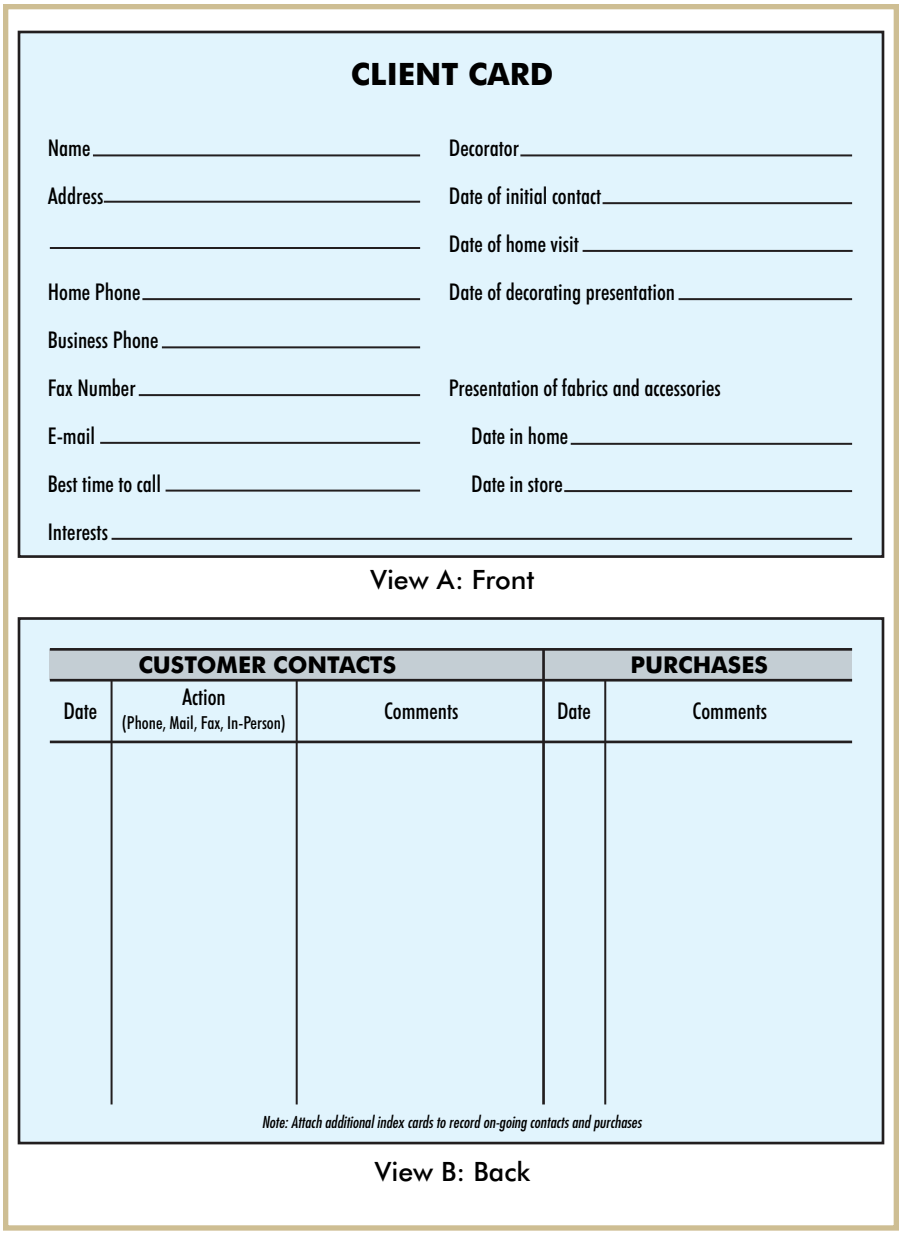
FIGURE 30—A monthly calendar allows you to quickly see what lies ahead.

The monthly section also allows you to see when you need to follow up with a phone call or a thank-you note. If you know when a roomful of furniture is scheduled to be delivered to a client, mark your monthly calendar so you'll remember to call your client and schedule an appointment to see the finished look and possibly take along some accessories to complete the look. Often, clients will tell you that they would like to purchase an item as soon as it goes on sale. Since you don't know when that particular item will be on sale, make a note in your monthly section to check the printouts of items that are going on sale when you receive them. When you notice that the special item your client has mentioned is listed, you'll look like the good guy when you call your client with the sale information.

A–Z Section

An *A–Z section* is merely an alphabetical list of all of your clients. Some stores have their own multipart forms to use for client information so that each part can be filed in a separate section. Other stores may have preprinted cards that you can file alphabetically in a card holder (Figure 31). You may also choose to use a desktop rotary file, such as a Rolodex, or a computerized file system. The advantages of the file cards are that you can carry them with you, make notes on them, and return them to the card file. The rotary file has similar advantages, but over time the cards will slip out of the holder if you repeatedly remove and replace them. The computerized file system is great, except that you can't carry one card with you and make notes on it without taking the entire computer. You can certainly print out the computerized information, but it isn't quite as readily available as just grabbing a card from the card file.

Organize your A–Z section alphabetically by last names, and use it as the basis for your mailing list. You can also use this section to call clients randomly to see if they need an item from an upcoming sale. Periodically flip through your card file and arbitrarily choose a few cards for this purpose.



CLIENT CARD

Name _____ Decorator _____

Address _____ Date of initial contact _____

_____ Date of home visit _____

Home Phone _____ Date of decorating presentation _____

Business Phone _____

Fax Number _____ Presentation of fabrics and accessories

E-mail _____ Date in home _____

Best time to call _____ Date in store _____

Interests _____

View A: Front

CUSTOMER CONTACTS			PURCHASES	
Date	Action (Phone, Mail, Fax, In-Person)	Comments	Date	Comments

Note: Attach additional index cards to record on-going contacts and purchases

View B: Back

FIGURE 31—This sample client card provides room for general information on the front (view A) and contacts and purchases on the back (view B).

Card files can become rather cumbersome if you keep active and inactive clients' cards in the same place. It's a good idea to develop a system to purge nonpurchasing clients. As a rule of thumb, if clients haven't purchased anything from you in a year, remove them from your active card file and move them to an inactive card file. One method to identify clients as active or inactive is to place a large colored dot sticker on each card when a client makes a purchase. Write the date of the purchase on the sticker. You can use a different color sticker for each year, so you'll know immediately during what

year the client made his or her last purchase. For example, if you applied yellow stickers over one year ago, remove those cards from your active file and put them in your inactive file.

Your A–Z section is the source for your mailing list, and it's important to keep this list up-to-date as well. Check your mailing list once a year to be sure that it contains all of your active clients. Remove your inactive clients from the mailing list after two years. It costs money to send direct mail advertising to people who have no intention of buying anything from you. Indicate on each client card whether or not the person is on the mailing list. Again, you could use some type of sticker for this purpose. These organizational tips for keeping a current client list will help you to control a large facet of your business—that of client service and client maintenance.

Item Section

An *item section* is a file set up according to particular items, such as "Accessories." If you spent considerable time showing a client accessories, and she indicated that she would be interested in purchasing the next time the accessories go on sale, prepare and file a card for her under the heading of accessories. When you get your computer printout of sale items, you can immediately check to see if the item that this particular client wanted is on sale. You can then contact her and possibly make the sale. This item system provides the quickest way to see which client you need to contact immediately about an upcoming sale. It's much easier than going through your entire card file, which can contain hundreds of cards.

One client may appear in more than one area of the item section. For example, you may have a client who regularly buys Early American furniture who is also interested in adding some accessories to her home.

Another way to set up an item section is to establish headings for specific styles or collections. For example, a heading for the "American Impressions Collection" is a way to keep all of your clients who purchased this collection in a specific file. When parts of this collection go on sale, you can contact them easily. If a collection will be phased out, you can contact the clients who purchased items from this collection and notify them of the upcoming discontinuation. If they want to add to or complete their collection, you've provided them with the opportunity to do so.

Using a Follow-Up System

The benefits of a follow-up system include the opportunity to serve your clients, to keep your name in front of them, and to provide you with additional sales opportunities. It's a good idea to send postcards to each of your active clients every time there's a sale or an exciting event, such as the arrival of new products or an intriguing collection. Sending a greeting card at holidays is also a good way to keep in touch with your clients. A postcard or greeting card keeps your name in front of them, encourages them to think about their home and perhaps some additional needs, and provides a service to them. The holiday greeting cards show your clients that you think of them as people, too, not just clients.

A follow-up system helps you to keep track of the sizable number of people that you service. As your client base grows, you'll find that you can't remember everything about each client. Having an accurate file system with each client's name, phone number, address, and any notes about the client's interests will help you to better serve your client and to increase your sales.

"Sales are contingent upon the attitude of the salesman—not the attitude of the prospect."

—W. Clement Stone

Telephone Follow-Ups

A telephone follow-up is simply a phone call that you make to your client (Figure 32). There are quite a few reasons why you should conduct a telephone follow-up:

- *Check on your clients' product satisfaction.* After an item is delivered or installed, call your clients to be sure that they're happy with their purchase. If there's a problem, it's better to solve it immediately rather than discover it weeks later after they've complained about your product to everyone that they meet. This call also gives you an opportunity to find out if they have additional needs, such as lamps or pictures. You can also ask them for a referral to their friends. Thank them again for their purchases, reinforce your availability for future projects, and tell them how much you enjoyed working with them.

FIGURE 32—Successful salespeople conduct telephone follow-ups to their clients.

- *Advise your clients of an upcoming sales event.* If they showed interest in a product that's now on sale, perhaps they would be more eager to buy it if they could save some additional money.
- *Check on your clients' interest level.* If you spent several hours with them on a Saturday and they didn't purchase, call them on Monday to see if they have any further questions that you can answer for them. This call also gives you an opportunity to find out if they purchased elsewhere and if so, why.
- *Make a general information call.* This call reminds your clients that you exist. Greet your clients warmly and remind them that you're available to help them with any of their decorating needs. This type of call lets your clients know that you care about them and would like to continue the relationship.
- *Thank your clients for a referral.* If your clients refer you to someone else who needs a decorator, call them, thank them, and listen to what they say about the person. Often, you'll learn something about this new client that will be of invaluable help.

Timing Your Call

How do you plan a telephone call that will be well received? Ask your clients for the best time to call them, and record that information on their client cards. They may give you a general time, such as evenings, or a specific time, for example, when the baby is generally napping. They may also give you a work number to use rather than their home number. When you do reach your client, first ask if it's a good time for them to talk, and then proceed with your conversation.

Another way to handle the best timing for a telephone call is to set up a time when you'll call. Let's say you hand a price quote to Mrs. Cook and she says that she needs to discuss it with her husband. Tell her that sounds fine, and then ask when she'll be discussing it with him. "May I call you the next morning around 10 to get your decision, so we can process the order?" is an appropriate way to let your client know that you intend to follow up with a phone call. If she agrees to the time, she'll be expecting your call. She also knows that you expect a decision.

Navigating Answering Machines

Not everyone likes answering machines, but they can be very useful. In case you get an answering machine, make sure you have a message prepared prior to calling a client. If the client isn't there, you'll be prepared to leave a message on the answering machine. Always tell your clients that you'll call back to be sure that they received your message. This accomplishes two things: You communicate your message to your clients with the answering machine, and you prepare them for an additional call. Perhaps they'll be ready with an answer by the time you call back. Here's an example of the type of message you could leave:

> Hi, Ann, this is Joan Smith from Fine Furniture. I'm calling to inform you that the cherry sleigh bed that you admired is on our spring sale. It's a savings of $200, and we can place the order starting this Friday. I know how much you loved it, and this is your chance to purchase it at a considerable savings. I'll try you again tomorrow evening around five to see what you think about ordering the bed. Looking forward to talking to you, Ann. You can reach me at 555-5555 until five tonight or all day tomorrow. Take care, Ann.

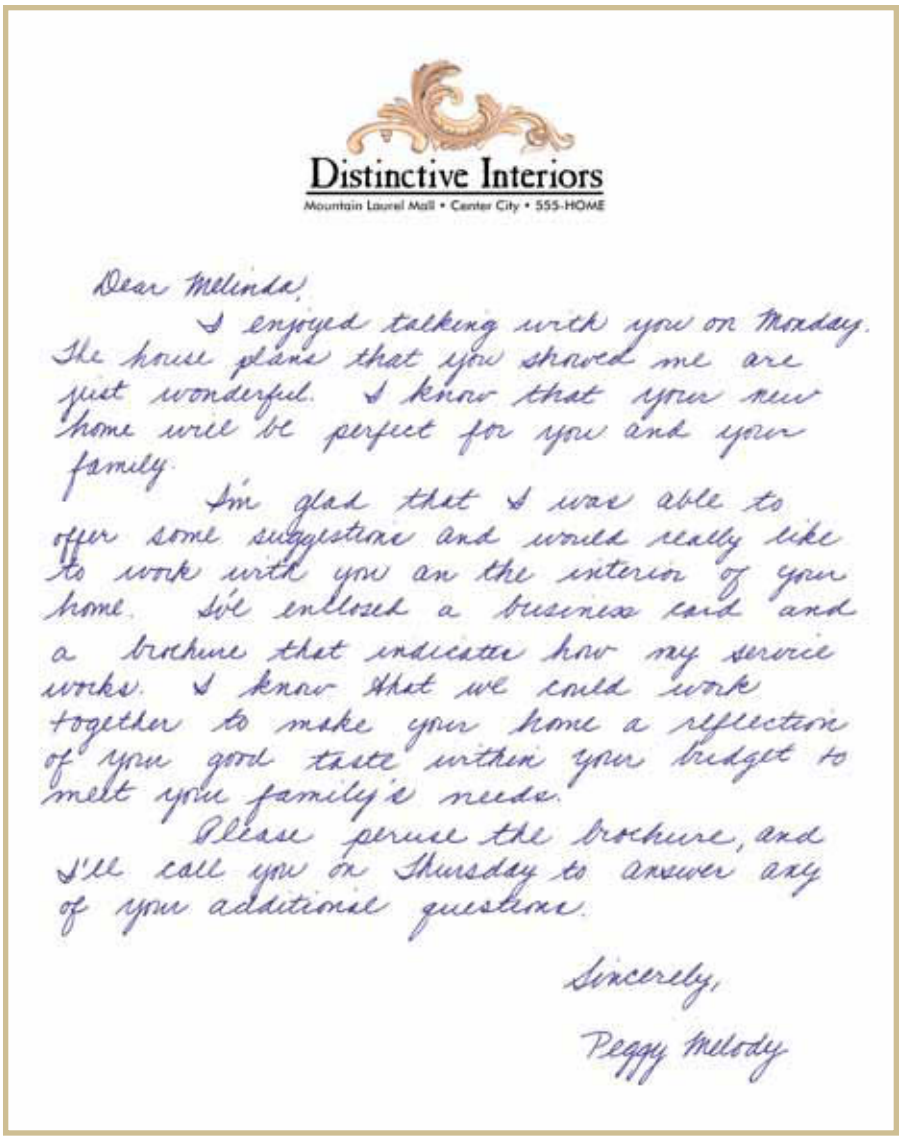
You can see the benefit of using the answering machine in this case. You haven't called the client away from something important, and you still have the opportunity to communicate. Leaving a message gives Ann some time to think about the bed, discuss it with her husband, and either call you at her leisure or expect your call around five o'clock tomorrow. Answering machines are also beneficial when you call with a problem. For example, when you call to tell clients that an item is delayed, you can leave the message on their answering machine. They'll have time to release some of their disappointment or anger before they return your call or you call them back.

Thank-You Note Follow-Ups

A thank-you note is an well-established form of good business etiquette. You send a thank-you note to establish your appreciation of your clients and their business with you. In general, there are three acceptable times to send a thank-you note—after an initial contact, after you've placed an order for a client, and when your client refers you to a friend.

If you meet a client and spend time with that person, it's appropriate to send a thank-you note (Figure 33). In the note, tell the client that you enjoyed meeting him or her. Mention some of the things you discussed during the meeting, and indicate what might happen next (a phone call, a letter about a sale, and so on).

After you've placed an order for a client and have learned the projected delivery date, write a thank-you note to your clients. In it, include the delivery information. Figure 34 shows an example of this type of thank-you note.



Distinctive Interiors
Mountain Laurel Mall • Center City • 555-HOME

Dear Melinda,

I enjoyed talking with you on Monday. The house plans that you showed me are just wonderful. I know that your new home will be perfect for you and your family.

I'm glad that I was able to offer some suggestions and would really like to work with you on the interior of your home. I've enclosed a business card and a brochure that indicates how my service works. I know that we could work together to make your home a reflection of your good taste within your budget to meet your family's needs.

Please peruse the brochure, and I'll call you on Thursday to answer any of your additional questions.

Sincerely,

Peggy Melody

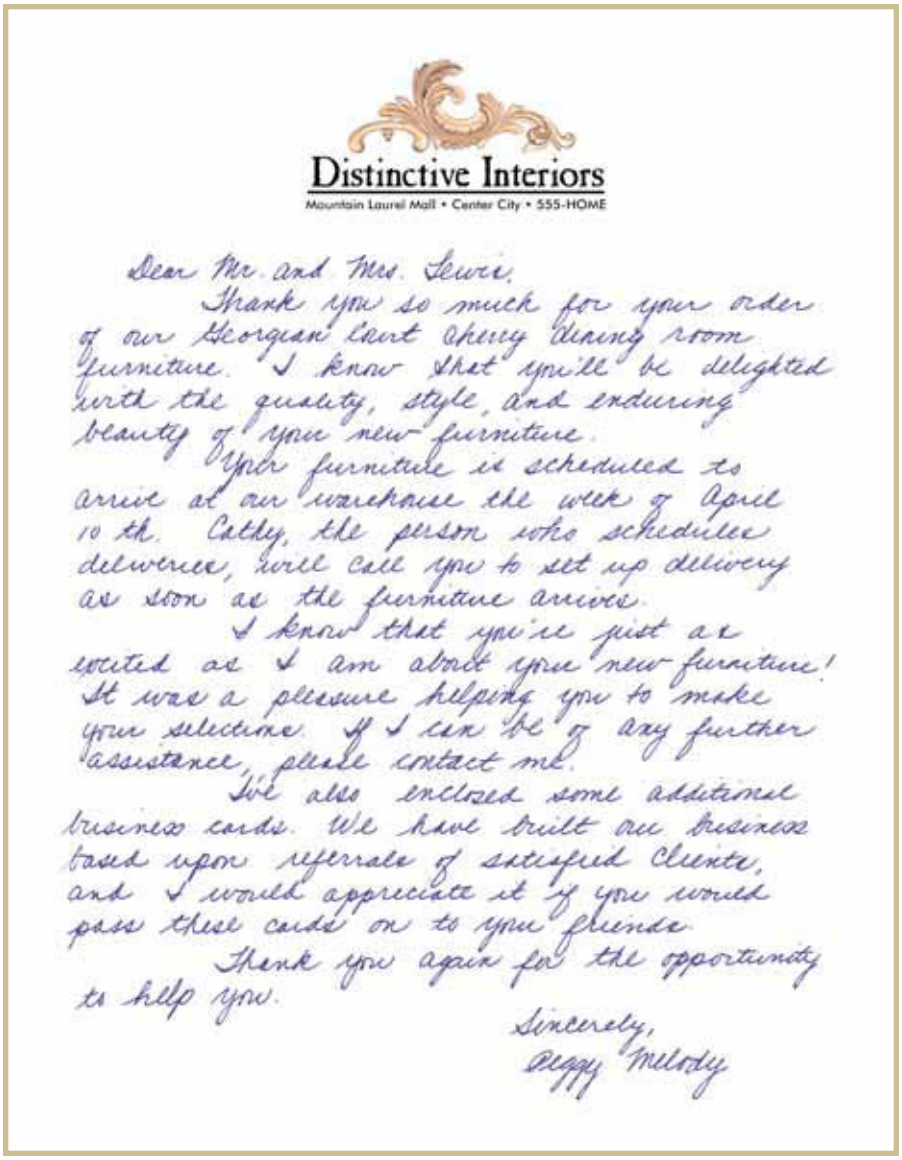
FIGURE 33—Here's an example of a thank-you note you might send after an initial contact with a client.

Finally, send a thank-you note if clients have referred you to a friend. Some businesses even offer gift certificates to the original clients if they send in a referred new client. In either case, always send a personalized thank-you note (Figure 35).

Here are some specific guidelines to follow when writing an appropriate thank-you note:

1. Remember that a thank-you note is a business communication. The note should be professional, but with the warmth of a personal note. If you spent a lot of time with these clients and have developed a close relationship, a personal element within the note is appropriate. Regardless of how close you became to the clients, however, it's still a business dealing. Avoid becoming too personal.

FIGURE 34—Here's an example of a thank-you note you might send after a client has placed an order with you.



Distinctive Interiors
Mountain Laurel Mall • Center City • 555-HOME

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Lewis,

Thank you so much for your order of our Georgian Court cherry dining room furniture. I know that you'll be delighted with the quality, style, and enduring beauty of your new furniture.

Your furniture is scheduled to arrive at our warehouse the week of April 10 th. Cathy, the person who schedules deliveries, will call you to set up delivery as soon as the furniture arrives.

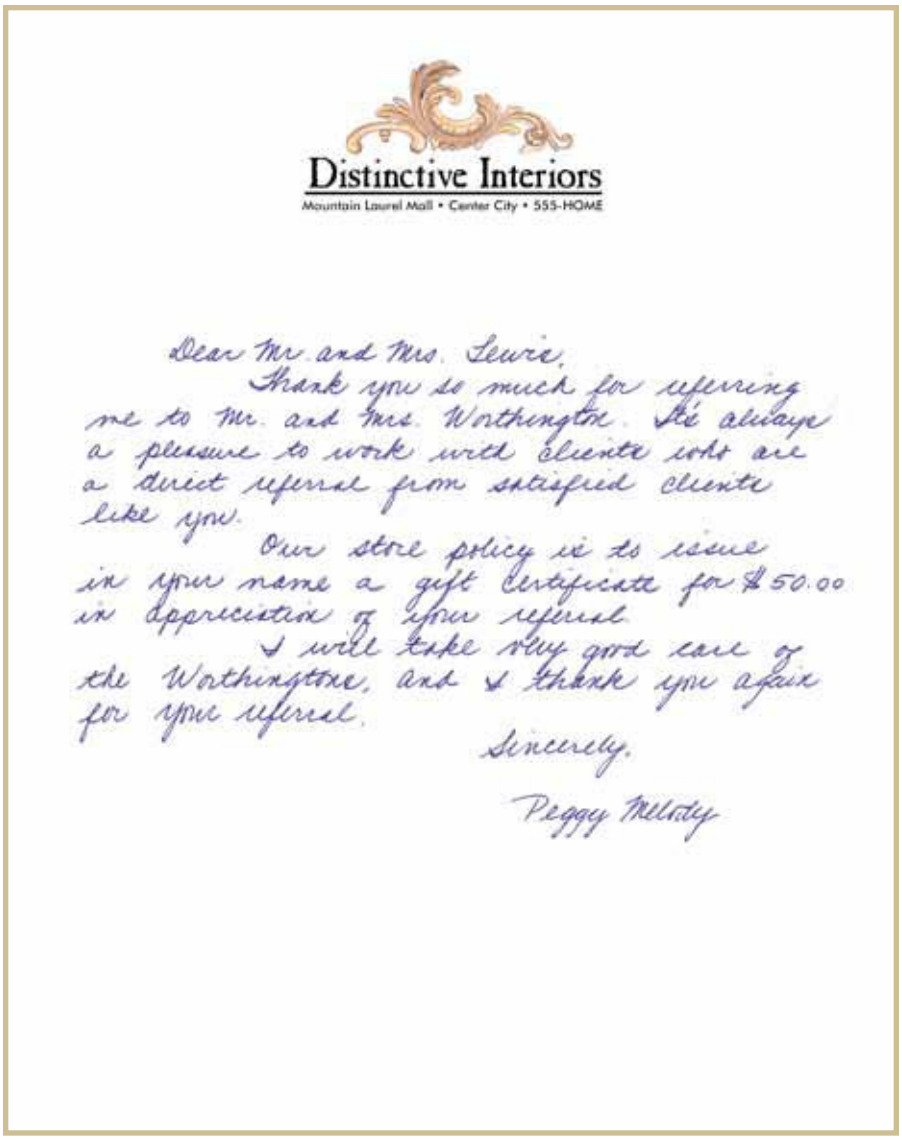
I know that you're just as excited as I am about your new furniture! It was a pleasure helping you to make your selections. If I can be of any further assistance, please contact me.

I've also enclosed some additional business cards. We have built our business based upon referrals of satisfied clients, and I would appreciate it if you would pass these cards on to your friends.

Thank you again for the opportunity to help you.

Sincerely,
Peggy Melody

2. Carefully proofread any form of written communication. Never send out a note with a spelling error, a crossed-out word, or a grammatical error. If you're uncomfortable with your spelling or writing abilities, have someone else proofread the note for you. Correct all errors, rewrite the note, and mail it.
3. As a rule, handwrite thank-you notes (Figure 36). This personalization shows your clients that you care enough about them to take the time to compose and handwrite a note. Although there are many preprinted business thank-you notes, your most effective note is handwritten and originally composed. One of the most impressive



Distinctive Interiors
Mountain Laurel Mall • Center City • 555-HOME

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Lewis,

Thank you so much for referring me to Mr. and Mrs. Worthington. It's always a pleasure to work with clients who are a direct referral from satisfied clients like you.

Our store policy is to issue in your name a gift certificate for $50.00 in appreciation of your referral.

I will take very good care of the Worthingtons, and I thank you again for your referral.

Sincerely,

Peggy Melody

FIGURE 35—This is the type of thank-you note you might send after a client offers you a referral.

thank-you note techniques is to handwrite the note on either letterhead stationary or note cards with your logo or business name printed on the face of the note. In this way, you combine a professional image with a personal touch. It shows the clients that you're a real person who deals directly with them, but also that you're part of an established business.

4. Keep your note concise. Decide what you want to say and be direct.
5. Be sure that the note is organized and covers all of the points that you plan to make.
6. Be positive, upbeat, and pleasant.

FIGURE 36—As a rule, a thank-you note should be handwritten.

7. Make sure that there are no smudges or smears on the paper. Your note should be fresh and clean—a reflection of your professional image.
8. Make the note interesting. A canned note isn't worth sending.
9. Be sure that the note is legible. A handwritten note is most effective. However, if your handwriting is poor or difficult to read, type the note or use a word processor with a script font. Always handwrite your signature.
10. If you've established a first-name relationship with your clients, address the letter accordingly. If you've worked with this couple for four months and call them Abigail and Joseph, don't use "Dear Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Singer" as the salutation.
11. Be honest and sincere in your note writing. Be yourself, and your genuineness will be evident. Otherwise, the clients will sense your insincerity.

Prospecting for Clients

To maintain a business and to have that business grow, you must keep the clients that you have and add new ones to your client base. Obtaining new clients is called *prospecting for clients.* In the world of retail business, you must search for new clients as well as keep the established ones.

There are a number of different sources you can use to find and develop new clients.

Client Referrals

The number one tried and true best source for new clients is direct referrals from existing clients. These new clients come to you after having seen the work you did for your original clients. The new clients have been told by your satisfied clients how pleased they are. It's a win-win situation. This type of new client comes to you already trusting you and your abilities.

Advertising

Advertising is also a source of new clients, and there are many ways to promote your business through advertising. It's wise to hire a marketing consultant within your area to advise you how to spend your advertising dollars, to determine your marketing audience, and to help you establish what percentage of your earnings you want to spend on advertising. Some potential sources for advertising your decorating business are radio, television, newspapers, telephone directories, and direct mail.

Radio. Explore what radio stations in your area target the age group that you wish to attract to your business. If your marketing consultant finds that the majority of people who use a decorator are between the ages of 40 and 50, then don't advertise on a station that appeals to the ages of 18 to 21.

Another factor to consider is the best time to advertise. If your target audience listens to the radio while driving to and from work, that's when you should advertise, even if it costs a little more at this time. If your ad is running at midnight when your client base is in bed, you've thrown away your advertising dollars. By working with a marketing consultant and the sales representative from the radio station, you can learn how best to make radio advertising work for you.

Television. Depending on your market, a well-developed television ad can be your most effective form of visual advertising. Television commercials include sound, sight,

and movement. You can show several room settings within seconds on television without wasting words to describe what the viewer is seeing—plus, it's in color. Although television ads can be expensive, they're highly effective if they're run during the viewing time of your target audience.

Newspaper. Newspaper ads can be either in color or in black and white. The secret of a successful newspaper advertising campaign is that of repetition. Research indicates that it takes a person six times to see a written ad before he or she even remembers it! The size, position, and composition of an ad also determine its validity. Your marketing consultant and the advertising director for the newspaper can offer you invaluable advice.

Telephone directory. Telephone directory advertising is a must for your business. As in all other advertising media, the size of an ad and the frequency of an ad determine it effectiveness. Your clients need to be able to find you. If you advertise in the Yellow Pages, you'll find that it's even easier for your clients to find you. Market research indicates that the Yellow Pages are the first source clients check when they're looking for a specific product or service.

Direct mail. Direct mail is one of your best and most effective forms of advertising. If you send postcards, newsletters, or brochures, you'll see a significant response to your advertising. Be sure that what you mail is professional, classy, and concise.

Self-promotion. Promoting yourself is necessary to make your name known to potential clients and to advertise your knowledge and skills. If you attend a decorating seminar, for example, write an article about the seminar. Include your photograph, and submit it to your local newspapers as a news article. It's a form of free advertising, and it highlights your professionalism.

Networking. Become a member of the local chamber of commerce. You want to be visible, particularly among other professionals who can afford your services. Volunteer your time on several committees to establish credibility. You'll meet other professionals who will think of you when it comes time for any decorating work.

Volunteer work. Volunteer your services for a community project that could highlight your talents. You can donate your services to churches, libraries, and community centers on a no-fee basis. Your talents will be on display for everyone who uses these facilities. Volunteer work is great advertising because your work is always in the public eye.

New homeowners. Try to obtain a list of names and phone numbers of people who have recently purchased a townhouse or land in a housing development. Contact these people as prospective clients. You can find this information at county courthouses. Real-estate transfer records are public knowledge, and they give you the names and addresses of the buyer and the seller, the amount paid for the land or the home/land package, and the location.

Target those homeowners you think can afford your services. Mail them a packet of information about your services. In the packet, include a cover letter, a brochure, and a business card. If you're able to obtain their phone numbers, follow up with a phone call several days later. You should feel comfortable calling them to see if they received the information and if you can answer any questions for them. If the family is new to the area, you may be asked to recommend a good builder, an Italian restaurant, or a dry cleaner rather than be asked about decorating. After you've made your recommendations and explained the services that you provide, they're sure to remember you when it comes time to think about the interior of their home. This is a great way to contact potential clients.

Cold calls. A cold call occurs when you obtain an individual's phone number through some source and then place a call to try to spark an interest in your services or the products you sell. To make a cold call, you must have a great deal of self-confidence, because the majority of people with whom you speak will rudely hang up. Don't take it personally. Simply move on to the next person on the list. The more cold calls that you make, the greater your chance for a call to pay off for you.

The obvious disadvantage of a cold call is that sometimes the person you call will be offended by the timing of the call, the content of the call, or the inconvenience of the call.

That's the chance you take, because you can't possibly know the person's schedule or circumstances. You'll need to make a large number of calls before you're successful, but it's possible to find new clients by cold calling. After all, if the success rate for cold calling were so bad, large corporations wouldn't hire telemarketing consultants to make innumerable phone calls to sell their products and services.

The secret to a successful cold call is your confidence in yourself and in your product. If you believe in your product and feel that you can sell it over the phone, by all means do so. Rehearse what you're going to say, how you'll overcome objections, and go forth with confidence.

Letters of Recommendation

No matter how you obtain new clients, always keep on file current letters of recommendation from satisfied clients. Copy these letters and give them to prospective clients, who have the option to check your references.

Congratulations! You've reached the end of this study unit. Before continuing in your program, please complete *Self-Check 6.*

Self-Check 6

Fill in the blanks for each of the following statements.

1. Obtaining new clients is called _____.
2. A follow-up technique that lists clients alphabetically is called a/an _____.
3. A/an _____ should be sent after any significant contact with a client.
4. _____ are your *best* form of advertising.

Check your answers with those on page 76.

NOTES

ANSWERS

Self-Check 1

1. False
2. True
3. True

Self-Check 2

1. False
2. True
3. False
4. True

Self-Check 3

1. True
2. False
3. False
4. True

Self-Check 4

1. You must determine what your clients want, why they want it, what their budgets are, how the item will be used, and when they need it.
2. a
3. d

Self-Check 5

1. feature
2. benefit
3. overconfidence
4. False
5. False
6. True

Self-Check 6

1. prospecting
2. A–Z section
3. thank-you note
4. Customer referrals